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S. Department of Agriculture
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For Immediate Release

PREPARATION FOR TOMORROW

"You can't escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today."

More than a century ago, Abraham Lincoln made this observation. But the wisdom is just as timely -- and relevant -- today as it was then.

In the 29 years since I first proudly wore a blue and gold FFA jacket as a freshman in high school, change has been the essence of our lives.

That fall, in 1947, for example, the average corn yield in this country was 29 bushels per acre. The average milk cow produced just over 5,000 pounds of milk annually. American farmers exported $3.5 billion worth of farm products. The Future Farmers of America had a membership of just over 238,000, none of them women. The Build Our American Communities (BOAC) program didn't exist.

We can put this change into perspective by considering a few of the same benchmarks today. The national average corn yield this fall will be around 85 bushels per acre. Average per cow milk production has been above 10,000 pounds per cow, for the fifth year in a row. Farm exports are past the $22 billion level. Your great organization has more than 500,000 members, more than 10 percent of whom are women. BOAC has created a new spirit in hundreds of rural areas. The countryside is booming with vigor.

Who would have thought such immense progress possible when I was an FFA member, like each of you here today?

Remarks of William H. Walker, III, Assistant Secretary for Rural Development, before the Future Farmers of America National Convention, Kansas City, Missouri, November 10, 1976.

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Each of us, no matter how farsighted, has a limited view of the future. In other words, we all wear blinders, to a degree. This is human nature. How we cope with our nearsightedness affects our careers, our families, our communities, our churches and our country.

It is especially imperative that each of you men and women on the threshold of your own careers consider the basic truth that no one has a perfect blueprint for the future. All of you, though can prepare for the future. That's an important part of our American heritage.

Since July 4th, 1776, when independence was declared, generations of Americans have been committed to making a better tomorrow for themselves and their loved ones. From their efforts, the thirteen original colonies have grown to a nation of fifty states with a population of more than 215 million people. The frontiers have been explored and settled. The wilderness has given way to farms and ranches, business and industry, towns and cities. And our country has become the most dynamic nation in the history of the world.

Freedom was won by those early patriots. And, since then, generations of Americans, both natural born and naturalized, have fought and died to keep the flame of freedom bright. The need for such commitment hasn't diminished one bit. If anything, the need has intensified.

We still face problems and the challenges which today may be different, but the principles for solving those problems and meeting those challenges have not changed.

Preparations have been made for you. Parents, teachers and others have dedicated their lives to helping you.

And out of that dedication, the FFA experience, I believe, is one of the most valuable opportunities that exists to prepare one for the future. Like each of you, I learned such principles as parliamentary procedure, the art of pulling together, a "roll-up-your-sleeves and go to work" attitude and a responsibility to my community and neighbors in FFA. I learned there's a lot more to success than a straight row of cotton or corn or soybeans.

As each of you finish school, you will face many decisions. Furthering your education. Finding a job. Getting married. Deciding where to live. The exciting thing, however, is that as citizens of the United States, you are inheritors of the right to make those decisions. You are endowed with the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; with freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom of opportunity -- freedoms and rights that have been carefully nurtured and passed on from one generation to the next.

With these freedoms go responsibility and accountability. For, as President Theodore Roosevelt once said, "The first requisite of a good citizen in this republic of ours is that he shall be able and willing to pull his or her own weight."

I do not have all the answers on how to succeed -- or how to make a million dollars. But I do know for certain that if you approach life with enthusiasm. . .with courage. . .with determination. . .with a positive attitude . . .and with resolution to make the most of each day -- you will know success. For you will be prepared for tomorrow. In so doing, you will be contributing your part in pulling your own weight.

As we meet the challenges of the future, it is not enough just to pull your own weight, however. Something more is needed.

That something is leadership. Real leadership. The kind of leadership which has been provided by rural Americans since our Nation's early days.

Our founding fathers -- many of whom worked the land or lived close to it -- set the stage for the progress this great nation has made.

They were not afraid to dare to be different; to make mistakes, to affirm the real, rather than the fake. They did not fear the unknown, were not afraid to take risks. That's the sort of leadership we need.

We need leaders who level with those they would lead.

Leaders of high character.

I challenge each of you to continue to develop this type of leadership. Your communities, churches, counties, states and the Federal government need it. Agriculture and rural America are dependent on dedicated, committed leaders.

The need for such commitment hasn't changed. If anything, the need has intensified.

As we look on the horizon to the year 2000 there will, no doubt, be a lot of rugged challenges ahead. Certainly, they will be different from hurdles of the past. Most of the 216,215,036 people in the United States who were recorded at 8:00 a.m. today (November 10), by the census clock in Washington, D. C. do not worry much about famine anymore. Nor do they spend much time wondering if dreaded diseases of yesteryear will strike their families.

But I can assure you, that keeping famine at bay -- coping with the race between the plow and the stork -- is a Number One concern in many parts of the world -- and is apt to be the focus of more and more attention in the years ahead.

We must all learn to live in harmony with our environment. In the days that settlers were coming to our shores, it was often said that England was overpopulated . . . "That the land weary of all its people," wrote one historian.

Surely the land and its resources have always been one of America's greatest blessings. The land made America. We have so much to be thankful for. But in the years ahead, the wise use of the land and environment will become even more important. For we no longer have an opportunity to move to new wilderness lands and virgin forests.

The wise use of our energy resources is a must on the agenda for the future too. Most of you here know a lot about farming. Consider the fact that when the American farmer traded his 22 million horses and mules for today's 4.4 million tractors, he severed the bond that ties vast numbers of people to the land in other nations. In so doing, he became totally dependent on petroleum which drives machines.

Consider in your own lives how dependent you are on the automobile -- and dozens of modern-day electrical conveniences -- dishwashers, vacuum cleaners, clothes dryers, etc. We are all dependent on energy. There's no question about that.

As you look to your future, you may say what do these big concerns -- famine, food, the environment, energy, poverty and others -- have to do with me as an individual?

Plenty.

Because you don't have to be an Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, a United States Senator, or even a prominent public person to make a difference.

Each of us, in countless ways, can exert positive influences each and every day. That's why the BOAC program is so important. It is built upon the premise that neighbors working together can accomplish far more for their communities than is possible in any other way.

Just recently, the National Association of Mayors met to discuss the problems of the cities. According to an editorial in today's Washington Star, Mayor Richard Hatcher of Gary, Indiana, was cited by the Wall Street Journal as recognizing that "money alone won't transform his city into the New Jerusalem." The Journal quoted Mr. Hatcher as saying in an interview: "We must draw upon our basic spirit to survive and rely upon our innate abilities to grow . . . If we're going to attract the business we need, our people must cut their grass, paint their houses, clean their neighborhoods. Manufacturers look at things like that."

The Washington Star's editorial concluded: "There is not now and never will be a federal panacea for restoring health to the cities. That largely is a job for local officials and citizens.

"Federal money will help but federal money is not magic."

Individual citizens doing their part, pulling their own load, are the ingredients for success in our country.

FFA and the BOAC programs are building blocks for that success. They are important in preparing leaders for tomorrow.

FFA teaches you to live each day as you would climb a mountain. Get a view of the peak, so you know your goals. Then learn the value of solid footing, or principles. You soon learn that progress sometimes comes slowly and with difficulty. Most important of all, you learn the value of preparation for tomorrow -- and being prepared for unknown challenges and opportunities.

That is the heritage of the Future Farmers of America.

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